

A Guide to Australian Moths

by Paul Zborowski and Ted Edwards

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If you put together Ted Edwards, arguably the foremost authority on Australian Lepidoptera, and Paul Zborowski, a leading nature photographer, it should be enough to ensure an accurate and superbly illustrated book – and that is what you get for this reasonably priced publication.

However, don't expect to be able to go out on to your verandah, check your lights and be able to identify every moth you see battering itself against the globe. That is not the purpose of the book and you will be disappointed. With over three hundred and fifty adult species depicted you will recognise some, but with more than 20 000 species of moth in Australia and thousands in Victoria alone you can see the logistical problem.

Instead, the authors have chosen to present the range of moth families found in Australia. Some families with few representatives of rarely seen moths are excluded but every family we regularly see around Victoria is there. The sixty-nine families included are clearly and beautifully represented. Butterfly families (which any real Lepidopterist regards as day flying moths) are not included as they are covered by plenty of good publications already.

Getting to know any group, be it orchids, songbirds or beetles, is a challenge. You need to get your eye in and you need to know which bits to look at. Each family in this book has its own section with features to help the reader develop those skills. Heading up each family section is a list of between five and ten identifying points that give you a clue about the features requiring close scrutiny. A few technical words are used but there is a functional glossary where they are defined.

Next follows a brief note on the family, with information and superb colour photographs of the moths and sometimes the

caterpillars. The photographs chosen illustrate the resting posture and general outline of the adult members of the families. Very large families such as the Noctuids and Geometrids have more photographs showing a representative cross-section. Each photograph is accompanied by an informative note on the biology of the species.

The extensive introduction gives considerable information about moths and their general biology. It is written in an easily understood style lightened by the occasional wry comment. (Adult moths have a 'short but not-so-sweet life'.)

But that's not all . . . Scattered through the pages are some gems – short articles on related subjects that give some great angles on the group. For example there is information on the moths that use wombat poo to fatten up before pupating. A fascinating discussion on the role of moths on bushfire moderation is a must-read for anyone who is concerned about the proper management of our forests.

This book is to be recommended. It is an intelligent and clear introduction to the moth fauna of Australia, suited to those who would like to understand more about this order of insects. For a precise identification the reader will need to go elsewhere (the book even gives places to go). Using this text will provide a much sounder basis for managing the search.

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